

A health program that gets kids up and moving

By The Miami Herald, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.06.14

Word Count **766**



Ashley Jackson, 10, (front) works out during Ricky Dickerson's fitness class, July 14, 2014, at Memorial West Hospital in Pembroke Pines, Florida, a boot camp for kids to help them stay active and healthy. Photo: Patrick Farrell/Miami Herald/MCT

At the word “go,” Ashley Jackson grabbed her orange weights. She lifted them above her head and then lowered them to her sides.

When the teacher said “switch,” she put them down and began jumping jacks.

Ashley is only 10. She is part of a Kids’ Boot Camp at Memorial Hospital West in Miami, a program aimed at getting kids in shape at an early age.

For Ashley, the 45-minute class helps her achieve her goal. She wants to lose weight so her clothes will fit.

“I have some clothes I stretch out,” she said. “It’s tiring, but it’s fun.”

Memorial West’s class is one of several hospital-based programs to help children stay healthy through exercise and proper eating. The programs are aimed at helping children become active.

The idea is to encourage healthy eating and exercise in children. Good health habits prevent health problems later on. Program organizers say parents need to feed their kids fruits and vegetables. They also need to limit television and computer time. All of these things, they say, should become part of a child's daily life.

"It's a serious problem and can only get worse," said Dr. William Muinos. He heads the Weight Management Program at Miami Children's Hospital. "It's all about health."

Encouraging Kids And Their Families

According to the government's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one out of every three children are obese, which means very overweight. Twice as many children and four times as many teens are obese today, than were 30 years ago, the CDC reports.

Muinós sees about 30 children every Friday as part of the Weight Management Program. He works to create plans for each child based on age, height and body mass index (BMI). BMI measures body fat based on a person's height and weight.

Muinós said he has worked with children who have had to lose more than 100 pounds. He tries to get the children to understand the importance of losing weight. But the family also must be on board.

"A child cannot do it by themselves," he said. "The parent has to make the commitment."

He starts by encouraging kids to eat more vegetables and less starchy foods, like potatoes and bread. The kids are put on a "doable" exercise plan that can include anything from walking to going to the gym.

"We have to make sure it's something a child will stick with," he said.

Muinós said most of the time the kid has to change his or her behavior completely. He said today's world of fast food, television and video games contributes to the increase in obesity.

Going To The Gym Becomes Fun

When 14-year-old Jose Carlos Sanchez met Muínós, he weighed nearly 250 pounds. Sanchez has already lost about 20 pounds and is continuing to lose more.

"I feel much better about myself," Sanchez said. "I have a lot more energy."

His mom, Mayelin Govea, said she is very happy that the doctor got her son's weight under control.

He didn't like to eat fruit or exercise. Now she takes him to the gym several times a week and he plays basketball with his friends.

"I see a big change in him," she said.

Miami Children's Hospital has a program for overweight Latina teen girls called Healthy Chicas. The sessions include exercise, healthy eating and cooking lessons.

At the University of Miami's Batchelor Children's Research Institute, overweight children are put on a plan that includes healthy eating and exercise.

The first three months are the strictest.

"The idea is to go hard and fast in the beginning," said Dr. Tracie Miller. "Really, the hardest part is just getting started."

But having fun is the key, Miller said.

Turn Up The Music!

At the Memorial hospital class, the kids didn't realize how hard they were working.

Teacher Rickey Dickenson tries to make it like a club with popular music and games. He uses hula hoops, sliders, weights and balls.

"I make it a rock star-type atmosphere and the kids get into it," he said. "By the end of the class they are all sweating."

Viana Espinal, 7, said she "feels good" about herself.

"I worked hard," she said, her face red from the workout.

For Linnea Martinez, the class is a great way for her sons to get used to physical activity. Martinez used to be a ballerina and often goes to the gym.

"I want them to be strong and confident," she said of her three boys, who are 7, 9 and 10. "And they are boys, they need to run off some of that energy."

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the first part of the article that describes things that should be part of a child's daily life.
- 2 Select the sentence that is MOST important to include in a summary of the article.
 - (A) She wants to lose weight so her clothes will fit.
 - (B) Viana Espinal, 7, said she "feels good" about herself.
 - (C) He said today's world of fast food, television and video games contributes to the increase in obesity.
 - (D) "I want them to be strong and confident," she said of her three boys, who are 7, 9 and 10.
- 3 Select the sentence that contains a word that is an antonym for "lean."
 - (A) At the word "go," Ashley Jackson grabbed her orange weights.
 - (B) The programs are aimed at helping children become active.
 - (C) Twice as many children and four times as many teens are obese than there were 30 years ago, the CDC reports.
 - (D) He works to create plans for each child based on age, height and body mass index.
- 4 Read the sentence from the article.

He tries to get the children to understand the importance of losing weight.

What is the meaning of the word "importance" as used in the above sentence?

- (A) concern
- (B) influence
- (C) purpose
- (D) value

Answer Key

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